

To: Ethan Barton[ethan@dailycallernewsfoundation.org]
From: StClair, Christie
Sent: Mon 2/22/2016 10:12:42 PM
Subject: RE: Animas River health

Please attribute to an agency spokeswoman:

While the Animas and San Juan rivers returned to pre-release conditions downstream, there are still significant metal loadings from numerous mining sources in the Upper Animas mining district.

Historically, the Animas River has an elevated "normal" (pre-event) level of metals independent of the Gold King Mine release, due to the constant supply of acid mine drainage into the river from many sources. There are literally hundreds of old mines, ore processing locations and other places where acid mine drainage containing metals enters small streams and creeks that ultimately enter the Animas River.

The United State Geological Survey (USGS) conducted sampling in the Animas River in 1995-1996 to measure the amount of metals carried by the river during the spring snowmelt period. They estimated an average metals load of approximately 2,300 kg/day. (In comparison, when the plume from last summer's Gold King Mine release reached the lower Animas River, it carried an estimated average load of 2,000 kg/day.)

EPA and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) conducted a Superfund Site Assessment of the area in the 1990s. The assessment identified the severe impacts to aquatic life in the Upper Animas and its tributaries from naturally occurring and mining-related heavy metals. In recognition of a community-based collaborative effort, EPA agreed to postpone adding all or a portion of the Animas Mining District to the Superfund NPL, as long as progress was being made to improve the water quality of the Animas River. Until approximately 2005, water quality in the Animas River was improving. However, since 2005, water quality in the Animas River has not improved and, for at least 20 miles below the confluence with Cement Creek and the water quality has declined significantly. Impacts to aquatic life were also demonstrated by fish population surveys conducted by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, which found no fish in the Animas River below Cement Creek for approximately two miles and observed precipitous declines in fish populations as far as 20 miles downstream since 2005. Because of this declining water quality in the Animas River, in 2008, EPA's Superfund Site Assessment program began investigations in Upper Cement Creek focused on evaluating whether the Upper Cement Creek area alone would qualify for inclusion on the NPL. This evaluation indicated that the area would qualify, although after receiving additional community input, EPA postponed efforts to include the area on the National Priorities List. Since that time, EPA has continued and broadened its investigations of conditions in the area in order to understand the major sources of heavy metal contamination in the Upper Animas watershed.

The EPA is currently working with state, local and tribal stakeholders to address long-term solutions, including a potential NPL listing, to the acid mine drainage discharging into the Upper Animas watershed.

Christie St. Clair

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From: Ethan Barton [mailto:ethan@dailycallernewsfoundation.org]

Sent: Monday, February 22, 2016 3:04 PM

To: StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov>

Subject: Re: Animas River health

Great, thank you Christie.

One follow-up:

If the Animas and San Juan rivers are safe, then why has the EPA pushed to designate the area a superfund site?

Thanks,

Ethan

On Mon, Feb 22, 2016 at 2:59 PM, StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov> wrote:

Ethan, thanks for being so patient.

Please attribute to an agency spokeswoman:

The EPA is confident that the Animas and San Juan rivers are safe for agricultural use and long-term recreational exposure. That's because water sampling has shown that both the Animas and San Juan Rivers have returned to the same condition they were in before the GKM release.

That said, acid mine drainage has been released into the rivers for many decades and winter runoff and major storms may kick up material that had settled to the bottom of the rivers. So those using the river for recreation, agriculture or drinking water should use the same precautions they always have.

EPA is working with city, state, county and tribal stakeholders to develop monitoring plans that will continue to assess the impacts of mine releases on the Animas and San Juan rivers. The monitoring will evaluate seasonal changes, including pre-winter and post-winter runoff and low-flow conditions.

The agency will continue to post water quality information as new data become available.

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From: Ethan Barton [mailto:ethan@dailycallernewsfoundation.org]

Sent: Monday, February 22, 2016 12:37 PM

To: StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov>

Subject: Re: Animas River health

Great, thank you.

On Mon, Feb 22, 2016 at 12:35 PM, StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov> wrote:

I'm working on it, Ethan.

Christie St. Clair

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From: Ethan Barton [mailto:ethan@dailycallernewsfoundation.org]
Sent: Monday, February 22, 2016 12:01 PM

To: StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov>
Subject: Re: Animas River health

Christie, can I expect a response soon? Thanks.

On Fri, Feb 19, 2016 at 3:55 PM, Ethan Barton
<ethan@dailycallernewsfoundation.org> wrote:

Monday is fine, but preferably in the morning. Thanks.

On Fri, Feb 19, 2016 at 3:54 PM, StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov>
wrote:

Deadline COB or Monday?

Christie St. Clair

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From: Ethan Barton [mailto:ethan@dailycallernewsfoundation.org]
Sent: Friday, February 19, 2016 3:53 PM

To: StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov>
Subject: Re: Animas River health

Yes, please. That would be great.

On Fri, Feb 19, 2016 at 3:51 PM, StClair, Christie
<StClair.Christie@epa.gov> wrote:

That's correct. I can get you some more detail if you like.

Christie St. Clair

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From: Ethan Barton [mailto:ethan@dailycallernewsfoundation.org]
Sent: Friday, February 19, 2016 3:43 PM
To: StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov>
Subject: Re: Animas River health

Hi Christie,

Yeah, I looked over this. My understanding is that, in essence, this says that the river is safe for use, though there are pockets with higher contamination unrelated to the Gold King Mine spill, but longterm effects require additional monitoring before conclusions can be made.

Does that sound about right?

Ethan

On Fri, Feb 19, 2016 at 3:35 PM, StClair, Christie
<StClair.Christie@epa.gov> wrote:

Hi Ethan,

You may find this useful – please note it is a DRAFT and will be peer reviewed before the results are finalized:
<http://www.epa.gov/goldkingmine/epas-draft-analysis-fate-and-transport-metals-animas-and-san-juan-rivers>

Let me know if that doesn't do the trick.

Christie

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From: Ethan Barton [mailto:ethan@dailycallernewsfoundation.org]
Sent: Friday, February 19, 2016 2:26 PM
To: StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov>
Subject: Animas River health

Hi Christie,

Hope all is well. I'm looking into the current health of the Animas River. I saw on the [FAQ page](#) that the EPA doesn't anticipate any adverse health effects to humans, livestock, or agriculture, and data on the impact on fish is promising, though long-term acid mine runoff has been detrimental to fish populations.

Could you please comment on the overall health of the Animas River in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and the Navajo Nation? I'm interested in the current quality and the long term quality, as well as the influence the Gold King Mine spill had on both of those.

I think I have a good understanding after doing extensive reading, but I'd like to be certain.

Thanks,

Ethan

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